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Country People

Fanny Dodgen

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Most of us past fifty can remember how good it was to go to the smokehouse and cut off a big slice of ham and fry it in an old iron skillet on a wood stove — also how deprived we felt when we had to take that old ham and homemade light bread to school for lunch and our wealthier classmates had “boughten” bread and bologna.

The trimmings for sausage and the fat for the lard were taken into the house, and the women’s work started. The sausage meat was cut in thin strips and ground in a hand-turned grinder that fastened to the big wooden kitchen table. The kids were often put to feeding the meat into the grinder and turning the handle. After the meat was ground, it was seasoned to taste (again, each family had its own recipe, and amounts of sage, salt, and pepper varied). The sausage was either stuffed into casings made from muslin, usually flour or salt sacks, or into casings made from intestines that had been cleaned, washed, and scraped inside and out with a dull knife until they were almost translucent. It took someone with a strong stomach to clean them, but they were very clean when finished. A special gadget was required for stuffing the casings, so most people put their sausage in the cloth bags. Later in the year if the sausage began to get strong, it was canned. It was fried, put in fruit jars, covered with melted lard, and processed.

The lard was cut in to little squares to be rendered the next day. It was done outside in the old iron kettle that was a must for every household. It was cooked slowly and stirred often to keep it from burning. It was finished when all the grease had cooked out of the fat squares and nothing was left of them but little crispy golden-brown cracklings. It was strained in to lard cans, allowed to cool and then stored in a cool place. If it had been cooked right, it was snow white.

Some of the cracklings were saved to make crackling cornbread or munchies for the kids. The rest were used to make soap. There were several kinds of lye soap; some of it was so strong and yellow that it nearly ate holes in a person’s skin. Some was so white and mild that it was as good as any soap that could be bought. The soap didn’t have to be made the next day; but if it was left many weeks, bugs would get in the cracklings. The soap was used for washing clothes, shampooing hair, and sometimes even as bath soap.

Nothing on the hog was wasted. For example, the feet and tail were cleaned and pickled. The jowl was cut off the head to cure, and the rest of the head, after the eyes had been removed, was boiled and souse meat (sometimes called head cheese) was made from the meat after it was taken from the bones.

Dinner (town people’s lunch) on butchering day always consisted of fresh tenderloin and liver, mashed potatoes, gravy, hot bisquits, some kind of dessert, and whatever else the lady of the house brought out of her well-stocked cellar. Everyone thoroughly enjoyed the meal because besides working all morning and being tired, it had been a long time since everyone had enjoyed the taste of fresh pork.

By the time everything was done, everyone was sick of the smell of wet hog hair, blood, hot grease, and all the other smells of butchering day. Everyone was exhausted, but there was a contented feeling because there was the assurance that the family would eat well that winter. ❶

IMOGENE BARGER, a farm wife, lives near Lookeba in Caddo County not many miles from the place she was born. Her interests, in addition to her family, include writing, local history, genealogy, reading, sewing, and crocheting.

not for the lazy and sluggish

COUNTRY
PEOPLE

By Fanny Dodgen

FANNY DODGEN has lived in Weatherford most of her life. A former teacher, she now does free-lance writing and photography and keeps busy with a variety of avocations — including the distribution of a popular weight-loss product.

Greet the rosy haze of light
 Eat hearty breakfasts of biscuits, eggs,
 sausage
 Unlatch barn doors at dawn
 Harness a palamino for a jaunt
 Cross cool streams in spring
 Walk tree-lined lanes in early morn
 Seek purple violets on creek banks
 Crumble soft, brown earth for planting
 Spread thorny berry vines to grasp dark juicy
 fruit
 Break ice on ponds at winter daybreak
 Squirt streams of warm milk into the mouth of
 a waiting cat
 Peel hulls from frosted pecans
 Gather around the fireplace for devotions in
 evenings
 Climb into bed for a restful night.